

Ancient Oaks Preserve is a 48 acre site made up of mature hydric hammock habitat. The majority of the site is maintained by an overstory of large/old; live oaks, laurel oaks, slash pines, and cabbage palms. A short, 20 minute walk will take you through the shaded hammock and identify many of the native plants along the mulched trail.

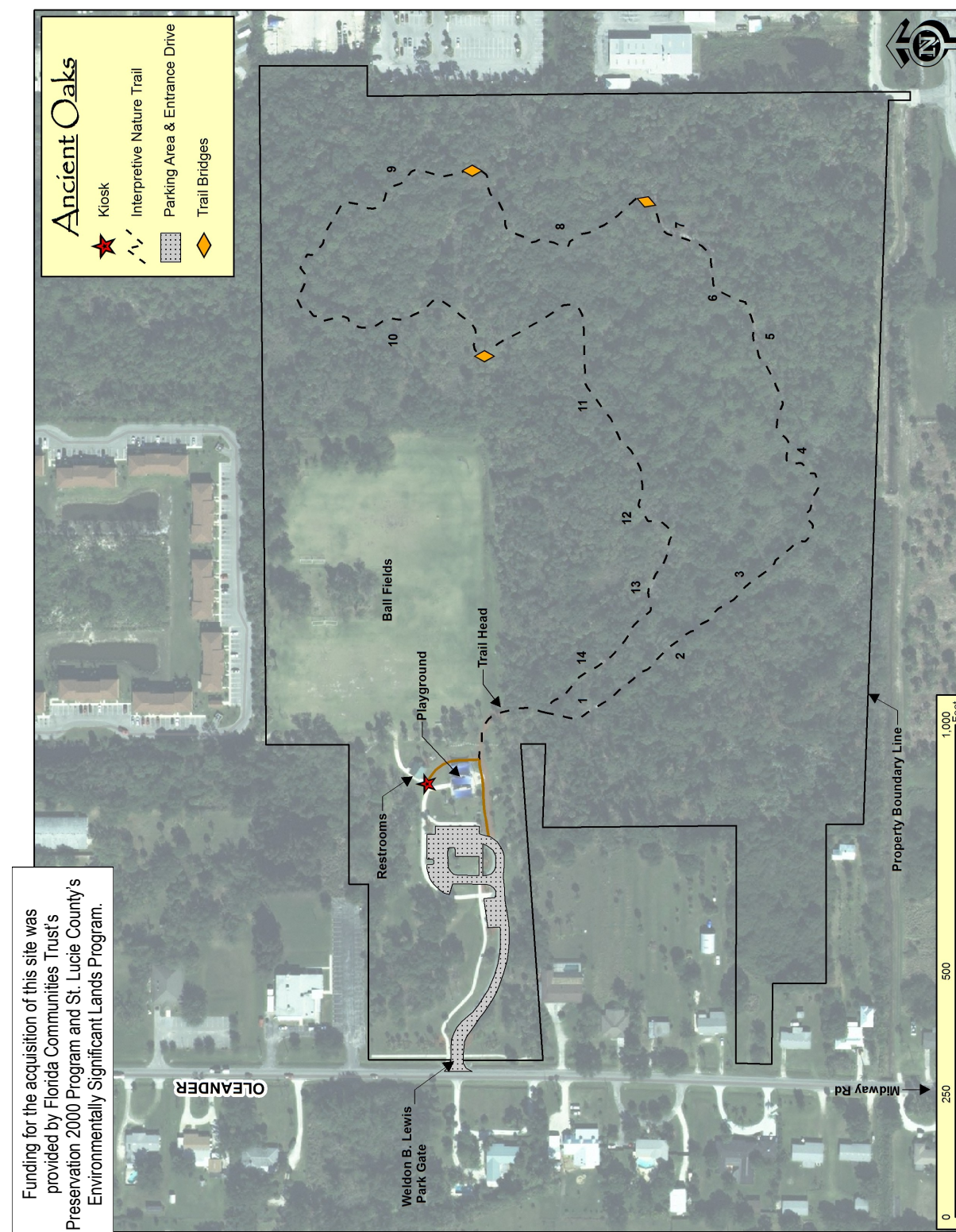
The trail head and parking area is located at 4650 Oleander Ave, Ft Pierce, 1/2 mile north of Midway Rd. (within the gates of Weldon B. Lewis Park).

The park portion of the site offers restrooms, picnic tables, playground, and ball fields.

Guidelines and Safety Information:

- Be cautious of uneven trail surfaces.
- Please remain on the trails.
- Carry adequate drinking water.
- In case of lightning, seek a low area away from trees, fence lines and tall objects.
- In case of emergency, call 911.
- While hiking the trail you may encounter animals indigenous to this area. This may include an alligator or a poisonous snake. Please observe from a safe distance.
- Leave all plant life intact.
- Please leave the site cleaner than you found it. "Pack it in, pack it out"
- This site is open from dawn to dusk.
- **Use this site at own risk.**

To learn more about St. Lucie County's natural heritage, there are more than 20 self-guiding interpretive trails located within the Natural Areas/Preserves. Each trail describes the most common plants, as well as significant geographical and historical features of the site.



Ancient Oaks



Interpretive Trail



**St. Lucie County
Environmental Resources
Department**
2300 Virginia Avenue
Ft. Pierce, FL 34982

772-462-2525



http://www.stlucieco.gov/erd/environmental_lands.htm
Site Open: Sunrise to Sunset

1) Saw Palmetto (*Serenoa repens*)

Leaves are fan-like, 3 to 4 ft. divided fronds, either green or silvery blue-green with vicious spines along the stalks. Trunk is creeping, rough brown that runs along the ground, forming dense thickets. Blooms are long branched clusters of tiny white flowers. Fruit are black 3/4 in. in diameter and are used to treat prostate health. **It is unlawful to collect / harvest plants, fruits, or animals from this site.**



2) American Beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*)

Evergreen shrubs are appealing in flower and especially in fruit. They are known for their colorful fruit rather than for flowers or foliage. The white/pink blossoms are hidden beneath 2 to 4 inch leaves in midsummer attracting butterflies and followed in the fall by tiny berries that cluster along the stems. The berries last two to three weeks and are an excellent food source for birds and for making jellies.



3) Wild Coffee (*Psychotria nervosa*)

There are two species of wild coffee in this area; this species with glossy light green leaves and another with dull, darker green leaves (*Psychotria sulzneri*). Each species has leaves that can be up to 6 in. long with prominent veins. Multi-trunk, shrub with brown bark. The blooms, small white flowers in clusters appear in spring & summer with fruit of oval red berries about 1/3 in. long. Fruit was used by Natives from this region for making “coffee,” although this drink is bitter and causes headaches.



4) Golden Polypody (*Phlebodium aureum*)

Just above you, growing on this live oak is a unique epiphytic fern that is native to Florida. It can be found growing on live oaks, cabbage palms, and other moist—well drained substrates. It is a rhizome epiphytic fern with many horizontal “feet” spanning the surface of which it grows to collect water from the moist canopy layer. The name, *aureum* refers to it’s golden brown scales that can be seen when view closely.



5) S. FL Slash Pine (*Pinus elliotii* var. *densa*)

The Slash Pine is adapted to living in this region and also adapted to fire, a natural disturbance that keeps this ecosystem in check. These pines, are not only useful to wildlife, but have also been very valuable to people. Slash Pine is named for the slashes created when resins were extracted to create turpentine. Look for trees with a wide base or with these “slash” scars along the trail. Early cultures ate the inner bark, seeds and needles, sap was used as a salve and an adhesive, and the wood was used, just like today, to create a variety of products.



6) Swamp Fern (*Blechnum serrulatum*)

This is the only species of *Blechnum* that occurs in Florida. Usually a common understory plant of the **hydric** hammock, this fern can also be found in wetter marshes and prairies. The species name *serrulatum*, refers to the serrated edge of the leaves. This species, like other ferns, are referred to as an “indicator species,” of a wetland habitat, hence the term “**hydric**” hammock. This area maybe very wet following a heavy rain, and in dryer conditions the water table maybe just below the soil surface. Look for the bracken fern, as it often is found in the surrounding area.



7) Ecotone

You may notice you are walking between two different looking ecosystems. Ahead of is a hammock (more traditional interpretation of a hydric hammock community) where the canopy is dominated by oaks and cabbage palms and little shrub layer due to shading. This area is much different then the slash pine and saw palmettos you just passed through. The “ecotone” is the edge of these 2 different natural community types. In Florida, just a small change in elevation can make a world of difference in the ecosystem types that occur. Ecotones usually blend into each other and are very important for wildlife, as they are able to exploit different ecosystems within a short distance of each other for food and shelter. As such, the greatest diversity of animal species is often found within ecotones.



8) Live Oak (*Quercus Virginiana*)

Common in hydric hammock ecosystems, this species is named for its longevity, reaching upwards of 300 years old. It is slow growing, with about a 1.5 inch growth in circumference each year. Trees have been reported with a branch spread of more than 150 feet and a trunk of 30 ft. or more. The acorns produced by these trees provide food for squirrels and birds, and also helped to sustain early peoples. Its strong wood was a vital part of wooden ship construction. It was reported that by 1832, almost all merchantable live oak within hauling distance had been cut to build ships. The branches serve as a substrate for a variety of plants including Resurrection Ferns, Butterfly Orchids, airplants such as *Tillandsia* spp., Golden Polypody fern, mosses and lichens. How many different plant species can you see on its limbs?



10) Cabbage Palm (*Sabal palmetto*)

Aka: Sabal Palm - State tree, the large fronds are deeply divided and folded in the middle. They are dull gray-green, 3-5 ft. across. Trunk is smooth and dark gray on older trees; younger trees are covered with cross-hatched old leaf bases. Blooms are small white, fragrant flowers that hang in clusters on 3 ft. stems, appearing in early summer. The fruit is round, 1/2 in., black, ripening in fall. The edible bud, called heart of palm, is considered a delicacy but collecting it kills the plant.



9) Laurel Oak (*Quercus laurifolia*)

Unlike the long-lived Live Oak, the Laurel Oak is shorter lived, only reaching a lifespan of up to about 70 years. Also in contrast to the Live Oak, it is a fast growing tree. When young, the bark of the Laurel oak is rather smooth, then later develops shallow fissures with rough edges. In Florida, it can also be found in flatwoods and moderately well drained soils. This oak produces large crops of acorns regularly. It is an important wildlife food resource for deer, raccoons, turkeys, ducks, quail, birds, squirrels and other rodents. Look for the typical base of the trunk as pictured above.



11) Gallberry (*Ilex glabra*)

A small evergreen of the holly family, it grows to 4-8 feet, with stems arising from tuberous rhizomes. This shrub layer species has alternate, oval leaves 1-2 inches in length and 1/2 inch wide with smooth edges except the tooth tips. The 1/3 inch berries turn black in early fall, providing food for wildlife. These berries hang on to the plant for most of the winter. Honey bees are frequent visitors to this plants flowers to help make honey.



12) Caesar's weed (*Urena lobata*)

A common invasive weed, that lives in disturbed soils. It grows to 9 ft tall. The leaves are wide ovates about 5--10 cm long and flowers all year. When the fruit dries it splits into five parts. The seeds are distributed by “hitchhiking”, easily attaching itself to human clothing and animal fur.



13) Bushy Bluestem (*Andropogon glomeratus*)

This tall perennial grass plant occurs commonly throughout the United States in low wet habitats where sunlight is present. It has a flattened base with distinct “bushy” spikes appearing during fall months. This species is very similar to broomsedge bluestem (*Andropogon virginicus*), only that it is shorter in stature and appearance at maturity. Seeds provide many song birds with forage and is a good alternative to exotic grasses in landscaping locally.



14) Muscadine Grape (*Vitis rotundifolia*)

This woody vine occurs commonly throughout many to most habitats of Florida, given enough sunlight. It is found climbing high into tree tops and sprawling over shrub layers. It is known to engulf areas where a tree has fallen due to newly emergent sunlight and may reach lengths of 40 meters. It's fruit is eaten by wildlife and people alike, and has been used for as a wine and jelly source throughout the history of Florida. The fruit occurs from July to September. **Info here within, is for educational purposes only. Do not consume plants based on this info. Some plants on this trail may be poisonous.**

